

Identifying Suspicious Packages and Envelopes

You should be suspicious of packages and envelopes if they have

- Inappropriate or unusual labeling
 - Excessive postage
 - Handwritten or poorly typed addresses
 - Misspellings of common words
 - Strange return address or no return address
 - Incorrect titles or title without a name
 - Not addressed to a specific person
 - Marked with restrictions, such as "Personal," "Confidential," or "Do not x-ray"
 - Marked with any threatening language
 - Postmarked from a city or state that does not match the return address
- Appearance
 - Powdery substance felt through or appearing on the package or envelope
 - Oily stains, discolorations, or odor
 - Lopsided or uneven envelope
 - Excessive packaging material such as masking tape, string, etc.
- Other suspicious signs
 - Excessive weight
 - Ticking sound
 - Protruding wires or aluminum foil

If a package or envelope appears suspicious, DO NOT OPEN IT.

How to Handle Suspicious Packages or Envelopes*

- Do not shake or empty the contents of any suspicious package or envelope.
- Do not carry the package or envelope, show it to others, or allow others to examine it.
- Put the package or envelope down on a stable surface; do not sniff, touch, taste, or look closely at it or at any contents that may have spilled.
- Tell others in the area about the suspicious package or envelope. Leave the area, close any doors, and do not let others come into the area. If possible, shut off the ventilation system.
- WASH your hands with soap and water to keep from spreading any of the material to your face or skin. Find out whom to speak with to get more information on what to do next.
- If at work, tell your supervisor, a security officer, or a law enforcement official. If at home, call your local police.
- If you can, write down the names of everyone who was in the room or area when this suspicious letter or package was recognized and the names of everyone who also may have handled this package or letter. Give this list to both the local public health authorities and the police.

*These recommendations were published on October 26, 2001, in [“Update: Investigation of Bioterrorism-Related Anthrax and Interim Guidelines for Exposure Management and Antimicrobial Therapy.” MMWR 2001;50:909–919](#).